



The Ely & St. Ives Railway

P. Paye

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CHAPTER I – HISTORY OF THE LINE

The Fens extending from Lincolnshire in the north to Cambridgeshire in the south and taking in parts of Huntingdonshire, Norfolk and Northampton provide some 680,000 acres of the richest farmland in Britain. Whilst the silt fens of the north are uniformly flat, the peat fens of Cambridgeshire contain many former islands, some rising to over 100 feet above sea level. Fenland settlements, such as Ely, Sutton, Wilburton and Haddenham were established on these pockets of high land and from these ridges Hereward-the-Wake fought the Norman invaders. From Roman times, however, waterways and causeways had been utilised as routes between settlements, but the area was always isolated from the surrounding counties and East Anglia and few strangers ventured into the dank lands.

In the 17th century the value of the fens for cultivation was realized and the Earl of Bedford with others contracted Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutch engineer to drain the land. Despite fervent local opposition to the scheme Vermuyden subsequently diverted the waters of the River Ouse from its original winding course into a cut or drain, 21 miles long from Earith to Denver. In the absence of local manpower Scottish and Dutch prisoners of war were utilised and work was completed in 1637. Unfortunately further flooding took place and later a second channel was cut half a mile to the east and parallel to the former cut. The new channel became the Hundred Foot Drain or New Bedford River whilst the old channel became the Old Bedford River.

Further drainage followed as small dykes and cuts were made and the land drained utilising wind and later steam power. Windmills were at one time located at Mepal, Haddenham and Sutton, whilst at Stretham the steam pump engine installed in 1831 was utilised until 1940. Smallholdings and farms were quickly established on the newly acquired soil and those not engaged on the land became peat cutters, fishermen, fowlers and boatmen. Road systems in the area were slow to materialize and barge and punt traffic remained far cheaper for the conveyance of goods than horse and waggons. Unfortunately water transport proved far too slow for perishable crops grown in the fens and goods often rotted before arrival at markets. The arrival of the few turnpike roads made little progress and it was not until the advent of the railway that improvements were made.

The Eastern Counties Railway striking north from Cambridge *en route* to Brandon reached the cathedral city and capital of the fens at Ely in 1845.

In the same year the Ely and Huntingdon Railway was authorised, but because of monetary difficulties only the short section from St. Ives to Godmanchester, 4 miles, 48 chains, was constructed and opened to traffic on August 17th 1847, the same day as the Eastern Counties Railway opened their line from Chesterton Junction, Cambridge, to St. Ives. Lack of finance caused the abandonment of the Ely–St. Ives section but the East Anglian Railway which acquired the Ely and Huntingdon, resurrected the scheme and obtained an Act of Parliament in July 1849 to build the railway, but the authorised time for construction was allowed to lapse and the idea was subsequently shelved.

The failure of another scheme to link Ely and Bedford by rail and the reluctance of the Eastern Counties Railway to assist with the promotion of any branch or cross country line left matters in abeyance. The merger of the ECR with the Eastern Union and other East Anglian railways to form the Great Eastern Railway with effect from August 1st 1862 subsequently changed the policy regarding official encouragement for local branch lines.

Thus in the autumn of 1863 two prominent landowners, Oliver Claude Pell of the Manor House, Wilburton, and Frederick Camps of the neighbouring village of Haddenham succeeded in encouraging enough support from other local landowners in the area to promote the building of a railway linking Ely with Sutton. The initial route proposed was along the fenland island ridge from Ely via Witchford direct to the town of Sutton. The leading exponents of the railway, however, living in Wilburton and Haddenham, villages on a parallel fenland ridge two miles to the south, opposed such plans and subsequently the routing of the proposed line ran a mile or so south of Ely before turning west across low lying fenland below the ridge and some half to one and a half miles from Wilburton and Haddenham. Having served these villages the route of the proposed line then turned directly north-west to terminate about half a mile from Sutton. By keeping to the lower ground the promoters maintained the railway on fairly even gradients obviating steep descents and ascents to and from the fenland ridge to the valley bottom.

The proposed Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway was discussed by the GER Directors at their meeting on February 4th 1864. The gathering was of the opinion the line would not harmonise with the GER system, neither was it considered to have any reasonable prospect of being remunerative. The GER, however, had no intention of objecting to the Bill outright, only with a number of clauses. A further scheme to extend the line beyond Sutton to Somersham on the St. Ives – March line, however, hardened the attitude of the GER board. Sinclair, the GER Engineer, was requested to investigate whether the extension would jeopardise the main line company's intended link up with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway and the GE (Northern Junction) scheme. Following Sinclair's report the GER offered the EHSR financial assistance of a third of the capital required for the railway if they withdrew the Bill for the Somersham scheme from Parliament. The Bill was subsequently withdrawn leaving the GER free to negotiate on the future working of the Ely to Sutton line.

The necessary plans were presented to the Private Bill office on December 23rd 1863 with copies to the Clerk of the Peace for the Isle of Ely and various parish councils on 30th December. No opposition was received and the Bill passed both Houses to become law on June 23rd 1864. The Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway Act 1864 (27 & 28 Vic Cap LXXXVI) authorised the building of a railway commencing in the parish of Ely St. Mary by a junction with the GER near Ely station 200 yards north of the (then) 7¼ mile post from London and passing through the parish of Stretham, hamlet of Thetford, extra parochial place of Grunty Fen, and the parishes of Wilburton, Haddenham, Sutton, Wentworth and Witcham and terminating in a field called Parsonage Close in the parish of Sutton belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Ely and occupied by J. Hawkins. The company was authorised to install a level crossing at Little Thetford where the railway crossed the London – Kings

Lynn turnpike road and also across a public road near Grunty Fen. Three years were allowed for the purchase of land and five years for the completion of the works. To finance the railway the EHSR was authorised to raise £36,000 in £10 shares with borrowing powers for £12,000 when half of the £36,000 was actually paid up. The GER was authorised by the Act to subscribe £12,000 to the undertaking. A clause in the Act also authorised the EHSR running power over the GER from the junction into Ely station together with use of sidings and other facilities. The original directors of the EHSR were Oliver Claude Pell of Manor House, Wilburton, Cambridgeshire, Chairman and James Cropley and Frederick Camps of Haddenham together with Lightly Simpson and William Henry Shaw representing the GER. The Secretary of the Company was T.P. Bond, whilst J.S. Valentine was appointed Engineer and James Wheeler, Solicitor.

The contract for the construction and works was awarded to W.S. Simpson of Park Farm, Ely, who tendered at £48,000. Lightly Simpson and Valentine recommended the contractor despite his poor work on the construction of the West Norfolk Junction Railway and the Ware, Hadham and Buntingford Railway.

During the Autumn of 1864 Valentine surveyed the route of the proposed railway and negotiated with landowners for the required land. Good progress was made and in the new year the contractor was given possession of land from the junction with the GER, a mile south of Ely as far as Stretham. By March 1865 surveys were completed through to Sutton and two-thirds of the required land had been purchased. Some of the landowners of the remaining required land delayed completion of purchase by demanding a higher price. W.S. Simpson and his men in the meantime made good progress from the junction and by mid February were preparing to lay half a mile of permanent way and complete the fencing off of a further two miles of the formation.

The initial lethargic local interest shown in the railway was dispelled by the commencement of construction work. At a meeting held at the Ship Inn, Sutton on February 8th 1865 and chaired by William Cole of Mepal a lively enthusiasm was shown in the line and as a result of the anticipated improvement to the area agriculture, several farmers and local gentry added their names to the share lists.

Valentine reported on March 11th 1865 that all the necessary surveys were completed and 6 miles 5 furlongs of land required for the railway purchased. The remaining 2 miles was expected to be in the hands of the Company by April. One mile of line was formed and fenced in and the Contractor was laying half a mile of track to carry ballast and soil to and from the uncompleted section. The Engineer optimistically hoped the line would open later in the year.

Satisfactory negotiations were concluded with landowners in the Sutton area by May when all land required for the railway was purchased. The Contractor continued to make good progress aided by fine weather and 200 or so men were employed on earthworks with a further 50 on buildings and other ancillary items. The site of Wilburton station was reached in June by which time Stretham and Wilburton stations and associated houses were also under construction. Work had also commenced on the building of the road bridge to carry the turnpike road over the railway west of Haddenham station. At the

end of the month Simpson commenced the section of formation from Haddenham working in a northerly direction towards Sutton. The edge of the high ridge was left as the peaty fenland required the adoption of a different method of construction and consolidation of the trackbed.

A freak storm in the area in July 1865 caused considerable damage when part of the formation was washed away near Stretham. The weather during the following months was good, however, and the Contractor's men quickly made good the damage and continued construction at a steady rate.

By August 1865 the railway was almost completed as far as Haddenham and the Engineer advised the Directors and proprietors that permanent way was laid to within half a mile of the junction, south of Ely. Between Haddenham and Sutton earthworks were completed as far as the boundary drain and negotiations were to hand over the purchase of additional land in the parish of Sutton. The station buildings at Stretham, Wilburton and Haddenham were in a forward state but work on Sutton station was delayed until the completion of the harvest.

The scheme for extending the railway beyond Sutton to St. Ives or Somersham was resurrected in the summer of 1865, when the local directors hoped to forward a Bill for the 1865/6 session of Parliament. After consultation with the GER Directors it was felt that time was inopportune for such proposals and the idea was again shelved.

In October 1865 the area from Sutton to Ely was hit by the cattle plague when hundreds of animals were slaughtered. At one stage the local navvies were blamed for carrying and spreading the disease in the district. The outbreak was so widespread that within weeks wiser thoughts prevailed and the workmen were allowed free movement.

Early in the new year the EH & SR Directors secured a working agreement with the GER whereby the main line Company provided locomotives and rolling stock to work the train services and staff to man the stations for 50 per cent of the gross receipts. The GER in entering the agreement maintained complete control of traffic between the physical junction of the two railways south of Ely and Ely station. This clause was arranged to prevent the EHSR from entering into an agreement with any rival railway company of the GER.

The Secretary of the EHSR initially notified the Board of Trade on January 2nd 1866 that the railway was ready for inspection and that the Company proposed to operate a passenger service between Ely and Sutton. The second notification was sent on March 15th and the date for the inspection was tentatively arranged for the end of the month. Captain H.W. Tyler duly arrived on Wednesday March 28th and travelled over the line accompanying GER officials and EHSR Directors, stopping at various points to make closer inspection. The fencing of the new line was partially post and rail and partially hedgerows. Tyler considered that a considerable part of the fencing was of insufficient height and at the stations consisted of three rail fencing only. He required the railway company to improve and heighten the fencing where necessary and the hedges to be carefully made up where growth was thin to prevent animals trespassing on to the line. The Inspector found the permanent way, one overbridge and six culverts to his satisfaction although he criticised the points connecting the double line with the single branch line at the junction south of Ely. Whilst the Company had erected a small signalbox at the

junction with locking apparatus the actual points were not interlocked with signals and Tyler required this to be rectified.

During the inspection at Stretham the Inspector found the platform canopy support columns only 5 feet from the edge of the platform and required them to be set back to a distance of 6 feet 6 inches from the edge with a deeper beam spanning between the columns to support the roof. The Inspector disapproved of two pairs of facing points in the main single line on the approach to Sutton and requested the removal of one of them with alternative arrangements for the lead into a siding whilst the other leading to the loop line was to be interlocked and equipped with a switch indicator. Tyler received no information from the GER Authorities regarding the method of working the line or which points were to be locked at the intermediate stations. He criticised the lack of distant signals but on being informed by Valentine that the line was to be worked by one engine only instructed that distant signals be erected on the approach to the junction and on the approach to Sutton station only. Tyler was adamant that an engine turntable was required at Sutton and also warned the GER that a new turntable be provided at Ely as the existing one was inconvenient for the size of engines to be used on the line.

Returning from Sutton the Inspector queried the unauthorised level crossing near Stretham and in his report stipulated the rerouting of a road from the south to the north of the railway to eliminate the crossing. Because of the incompleteness of works, the unauthorised level crossing and the numerous alterations, Captain Tyler refused to sanction the opening of the railway with the proviso that the position would be reviewed within a month.

Valentine was immediately requested by the Directors to rectify the shortcomings mentioned by the Inspector and he quickly conferred with both Simpson and the local GE Engineer. On April 7th both the EHSR and GER officially notified the Board of Trade that the line was to be worked by Train Staff only. On the same day the Secretary of the local railway also notified that the EHSR intended to close the unauthorised level crossing by making a road on the north side of the railway from the Cambridge-Ely turnpike road leading from Little Thetford to Grunty Fen within three months. They also intended to provide a turntable at Sutton within the same period. The GER authorities wrote later in the month advising the points at Stretham, Wilburton and Haddenham station sidings were to be kept locked for the main single line. Valentine advised that the contractor had moved the platform fences back at Stretham and Wilburton and replaced the canopy beams by support brackets at the former station.

Captain H.W. Tyler was obviously satisfied with the speedy progress of the remedial work for he authorised the opening of the line to all traffic on April 7th 1866, a decision which was passed on to the GER and EHSR Directors two days later with the added proviso that the authority was subject to the satisfactory completion of the outstanding work.

The formal opening of the railway was arranged for April 6th when the local Directors and GER officers, who had stayed at Ely overnight, travelled by special train from Ely to Sutton and back stopping on the outward journey to inspect the new stations. The special was hauled by Gooch 2-2-2 tender locomotive No. 276.

The railway was opened to the public on April 16th 1866 with little enthusiasm shown by the local populace. Much to the surprise of the villagers

at Sutton, Haddenham, Wilburton and Stretham no market tickets were issued to Ely, and the cheap parliamentary fares were only available on one up train, the 8.10 a.m. ex-Sutton. A letter to the 'Cambridge Independent Press' published on April 28th 1866 complained of the prohibitive fare from Sutton to Ely and back of 2s 0d which represented a fifth of the average agricultural workers weekly wage in the fens at that time. The writer requested market day tickets issued at parliamentary or half parliamentary rates as on other GER lines in the Ely area.

The initial single fares charged were:

Sutton to Haddenham	1st class	5d	2nd	4d	3rd	3d
" Wilburton	"	8d	"	6d	"	5d
" Stretham	"	1/-d	"	10d	"	7d
" Ely	"	1/8d	"	1/4d	"	1/-d

On August 6th 1866 the 8.10 a.m. Sutton to Ely train formed of three 4-wheel coaches, brake van No. 118, composite No. 206 and 3rd class No. 83 hauled by 'Jenny Lind' class 2-2-2 tender locomotive No. 107 running tender first became derailed 'all vehicles' at Ely Sutton Branch Junction. In evidence Driver James Beaumont, who had ten years footplate experience, including one on passenger trains, stated that he approached the junction at a slow speed of 8 mph, more slowly than usual, as there were no wagons to pick up at intermediate stations and the train was running on time. The signalman at the junction, Daniel Hall, inspected the points a quarter of an hour before the train arrived at 8.33 a.m. and noted that despite the slow approach the vehicles were oscillating considerably.

MacAllen, the Cambridge District Motive Power Officer, travelled to the site of the incident with the accident brake and established that the trailing wheels of No. 107 had left the rails at the points and dragged the carriages off the road to the right, whilst the tender had fallen on its side to the left.

On September 28th 1866 the Directors reported to the shareholders their disappointment at the low receipts which had been adversely affected by the serious and lengthy outbreak of cattle plague in the area. Receipts from the opening of the line to June 30th amounted to: Passenger £161 8s 11d, Parcels £5 14s 8d, and Goods £199 1s 1d, Total £366 4s 8d.

On September 29th 1866 Simpson requested payment of £68 7s 0d for the provision of the turntable at Sutton, while on August 29th 1867 the contract for the building of a shed for corn storage at Wilburton was let to Mr Waters of Haddenham. this was completed the following year at a cost of £150.

Receipts for the second half year of operation to June 30th 1867 showed an 8.4 per cent reduction from the previous period as the figures below show, although a 1½ per cent dividend was paid to shareholders:

<i>December 31st 1866</i>		<i>June 30th 1867</i>
£429 19s 1d	Passenger	£370 18s 5d
£ 38 0s 6d	Horses	£ 22 3s 1d
£808 17s 5d	Goods	£777 0s 2d
£1,276 17s 0d		£1,170 1s 8d

By the end of June 1867 £49,679 8s 6d had been expended on the building of the railway and associated work.

Expenditure on the railway to June 30th 1868 had increased by £288 3s 4d and reached £49,967 11s 10d whilst receipts for the six months ending were a 4.5 per cent increase over the previous June returns.

The first half yearly receipts for 1868 increased by 7.2 per cent and the shareholders received a 2 per cent dividend whilst receipts to December 31st increased by a further £165. Passenger takings, however, remained almost static, most of the increase was from the conveyance of goods.

In May 1868 the Great Eastern Authorities notified the EHSR Board that the previous year the line had worked at a deficit of £1,211. In view of their financial collapse in 1866 the main line company was in no position to sustain such conditions and required an increase in the 50 per cent of gross receipts working arrangement. The local Directors were not happy with such proposals bearing in mind that the steady increase in traffic on the line was producing a dividend which any increase in rate would dissolve. The EHSR Board duly notified that they had entered into the original agreement for 10 years from April 16th 1866 and refused to re-enter negotiations.

The continuation of the railway to the west and south of Sutton was still in the minds of developers and in 1868 plans were formulated for the Haddenham, Willingham and Longstanton Railway. The undertaking sought running powers over the GER and Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway and the Bill was presented to Parliament at the 1869 session.

On March 28th 1869 the EHSR Directors and proprietors agreed to petition against the Bill and called for the withdrawal of the obnoxious provision regarding running powers included in the Bill. It was later decided not to impede the Bill but the EHSR Company sought to restrict the running powers granted to the new railway to Sutton station only. Another venture the Sutton, Mepal and Somersham Railway failed to get its Bill past the Parliamentary deadline. This Company also proposed a working agreement with the GER.

The Great Northern Railway had for some years contemplated an extension from their Cambridge branch at Shepreth to March bypassing the University city and striking north paralleling the GER St. Ives—March line. One of the proposed routes was via Earith Bridge where the line was to cross the Great Ouse on its way to the ultimate goal at Lincoln. At the time relations between the GE and GN were not on the best of terms and the proposed move brought alarm at Bishopsgate. Charles Parkes as Chairman of the GER actually pursued the proposal for the extension from Sutton to St. Ives to prevent the GNR from building their competitive route through the centre of GER territory.

The idea for the extension beyond Sutton to St. Ives had been initially revived as early as 1872, as the failure of the local schemes brought doubts as to the future role of the EHSR. It was evident to the GE authorities that the steady increase of traffic at Sutton, Haddenham, Wilburton and Stretham, although satisfactory in the short term, would fail to increase to such an extent in the long term. The proposal by the GNR to infiltrate the GE area finally settled the issue beyond doubt and plans for the extension to St. Ives were drawn up and prepared for presentation to Parliament in 1876. John Valentine was requested to resurvey the route of 1864 as quickly as possible and prepare drawings for the viaduct to carry the railway over the River Ouse. On September 29th 1875 Valentine submitted his estimates for the building of the extension totalling £62,928 12s 6d.

The plans for the extension were prepared by November 10th 1875 and were submitted to the Private Bill Office of Parliament. Copies were also sent to the Clerks of the Peace for the Isle of Ely at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire at Cambridge, and Huntingdonshire at Huntingdon on November 30th. No objections to the proposal were received and the Bill had a smooth trip through both Houses.

The Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway Extension Act (39 and 40 Vic Cap VI) dated April 7th 1876 authorised the construction of a railway 8 miles 3 furlongs 8 chains and 30 links in length, commencing in the parish of Sutton in the Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire by a junction with the existing railway of the Company, 16 chains or thereabouts from the existing terminus and passing through the parishes of Sutton, Haddenham and Bluntisham-with-Earith and terminating in the parish of Holywell-cum-Needingworth in the County of Huntingdonshire by a junction with the St. Ives—March Railway of the GER, 9 chains 30 links north of the 74 mile post from London. To finance the work the company was authorised to raise £60,000 in £10 shares and borrow £20,000 when half of the ordinary capital was paid up. Three years was allowed for the compulsory purchase of land and five years for the completion of works.

The Act also specified certain requirements regarding the crossing of the River Ouse. The consent of the Bedford Level Corporation was to be obtained before any work was carried out on the bridges or embankments near the Ouse at the Bedford Level. In carrying the railway over the Great Ouse the EHS Company was required to erect a substantial bridge with two spans or openings of a clear width of 60 feet each, measured at right angles across the river. Piers were to be erected to allow a towpath 6 feet wide to be maintained alongside the river whilst the span of the bridge or viaduct was to be at least 8 feet above the high water level. The bridge over the West River near Earith was required to have a 30 foot span at least 7 feet above the high water level whilst allowing for a 6 feet wide towpath alongside the waterway.

Finally the Act authorised the Company to change its name from the Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway to the Ely and St. Ives Railway when the extension line was opened for traffic.

The Directors at their meeting on April 11th 1876 requested Valentine to finalise the surveying of the route of the proposed railway without delay and within a month the Engineer had made arrangements with the Bedford Level Commissioners regarding the viaduct to carry the railway over the River Ouse. Most of the finance for the extension was raised by the GER.

Final surveys were made by Valentine during May and June 1876 and the following month tenders were invited for the construction of the line. Meanwhile receipts on the Ely—Sutton section for six months ending June 30th 1876 showed a 3.1 per cent increase over the receipts for the same period the previous year, at Passenger £476 11s 3d, Horses £35 9s 1d, Goods £821 2s 7d, Total £1,333 2s 11d.

William T. Mousley was awarded the contract for the construction of the line tendering at £17,840. The contract specified that Mousley would execute the actual work with all materials, land and ancillary items supplied by the GER. By agreement under the Act of 1876 the GER was authorised to lease the Ely and St. Ives Railway on a 999 year lease, in return paying any additional

expenses required to make, maintain or improve the line. The GER also assumed the responsibility for the payment of interest on the debenture and debenture stock of the Ely and St. Ives Company 4 per cent on the £36,000 initial stock and 5 per cent on £60,000 extension stock.

By an agreement under the Act of 1876 the GER was authorised to lease the E&SIR for 999 years in return for paying additional expenses required for building the line.

When the railway was first mooted it was planned to have only one intermediate station between St. Ives and Sutton, at Bluntisham. Application was, however, received from Mr. Taylor, a landowner at Earith, for a station to serve the local community. In return for the asset Taylor offered to sell his land to the Company for £800 instead of £1,050 if the station was built at the locally known Hermitage Road. The GER agreed to site the station according to Taylor's wishes on condition that if traffic was insufficient to warrant staffing or maintenance they could close it and repay Taylor the outstanding £250.

On March 3rd 1877 John Valentine, the Company engineer, reported that the work on the viaduct over the Ouse was proving troublesome although the foundations for the west end abutments, two large river piers and one small pier were laid in November 1876, the whole valley had since flooded and work ceased. Messrs Cochrane had, however, completed the order to supply the girder sections and these would be placed in position once the piers were built.

The foundations of another bridge at 5 miles 70 chains were laid, but again flooding had halted progress. The small drain bridges were still to be built but all culverts were completed. The permanent way material for the whole extension had been delivered while 85 occupational crossing gates were erected. The engineer concluded his report to the proprietors by advising that tenders had been invited for the building of stations, gate lodges and signalboxes.

On August 4th 1877 Valentine reported on the progress of the railway. Of the 86,000 cubic yards of earthworks required for the railway 74,757 cubic yards had been completed. All bridges and culverts were completed except for 2 bridges spanning fenland drains which were being built. Work on the viaduct at Earith over the Ouse was nearing completion. The disastrous wet weather earlier in the year caused the area of flooding to remain until May and all work on the structure had stopped for a period of 5 months. The Engineer reported that the brick piers were all completed whilst the iron cylinders in the middle of the waterway had been sunk into the blue clay, and the cylinders subsequently filled with concrete. It was hoped to have the whole structure completed at the end of August. Of the stations Valentine was able to report that the new Sutton station was almost completed while that at Bluntisham would be completed within two weeks. The third station at Hermitage was in the course of erection.

The EHSR Secretary initially advised the Board of Trade on March 6th 1878 of the notice of intention to open the extension line to traffic to which a second application was sent on April 27th. A letter from the GER Headquarters advised that the new line was to be worked by Train Staff and Ticket with block sections. Major General Hutchinson duly made the official inspection on Friday May 3rd 1878. The Inspector found that the width of formation

was enough for double track if growth of traffic warranted such improvements in future. The permanent way was in good order as were the overbridges. The 4 underbridges, 4 culverts and viaduct over the River Ouse were closely inspected and considered adequate, the girders of the viaduct and bridges giving moderate deflections when tested by the two heavy locomotives running at speed. The Major General noted the 3 authorised public level crossings and the signal-boxes provided at Needingworth Junction, Bluntisham, Earith Bridge and Sutton. In his report Hutchinson noted various deficiencies: at Sutton the 10-chain radius curve required a check rail, while the Down distant signal was partly unsighted by trees. The signal-boxes at Dutton and Bluntisham required modification, and the weights of two signals were too close to the line to allow trains to pass. Subject to remedial work being carried out the line could be opened for traffic.

The extension from Sutton to St. Ives opened without ceremony on Friday May 10th 1878. Few passengers travelled on the line until the following Monday when full advantage was taken to travel to and from St. Ives market. The timing of the afternoon train was considered unsuitable as those farmers and corn merchants who attended their markets which ended at 3.30 p.m. were forced to wait until 5.30 p.m. before the branch train departed. A number of written complaints requested the GE to alter the timing in the new timetable for June 1878.

With the advent of the railway the GER failed to gain absolute monopoly of goods traffic and local carrier services flourished on a reduced basis until well into the 1880s. By 1879 the waggons of Nunn and Gimbert journeyed from Sutton to St. Ives on Mondays whilst Gimbert ran a carrier service to Ely on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. William Amory was acting as local carrier at Haddenham travelling to Cambridge on Saturdays and St. Ives on Mondays. Thomas Pant and Nightingale also went to Cambridge on Saturdays whilst Pant also travelled to Ely on Thursdays and St. Ives on Mondays.

By an Act of Parliament dated July 21st 1879 (42 & 43 Vic Cap CL) the Ely and St. Ives Railway was leased to the GER for a period of 999 years as agreed in the Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Extension Act of 1876 on terms advantageous to both companies.

In agreement under the Act of 1876 the GER took over the full working of the Ely and St. Ives Railway on a 999 years lease. The main line Company in return guaranteed interest of 2 per cent per annum on the original £38,000 Capital and 5 per cent on the £60,000 Capital raised for the extension, but from 1881 the former was increased to 4 per cent.

The local fares charged to and from branch stations in 1886 were:

Ely to	1st Class	3rd Class	St. Ives to	1st Class	3rd Class
Stretham	7d	3d	Bluntisham	9d	4d
Wilburton	11d	5d	Earith Bridge	1/2d	6d
Haddenham	1/2d	6d	Sutton	2/1d	10d
Sutton	1/5d	7½d	Haddenham	2/3d	1/-d
Earith Bridge	2/3d	1/-d	Wilburton	2/3d	1/1d
Bluntisham	2/3d	1/2d	Stretham	2/3d	1/3d
St. Ives	2/3d	1/5d	Ely	2/3d	1/5d

Grain traffic on the branch continued to increase over the years and an old complaint regarding the storage of the commodity in dry conditions, was resurrected. Remedial steps were taken in April 1889 when authority was given for the erection of a grain shed at Bluntisham at an estimated cost of £400.

Sutton station at the time of the building of the extension to St. Ives was adequate for traffic requirements but the gradual increase in traffic by 1895 necessitated the use of the lamp trimming room for other requirements. To obviate the problem of the shortage of space one of the block boxes utilized by the GER at Cambridge during the Royal Show Week was transported to Sutton and became the new lamp room.

In the 1890s Chivers Ltd opened a jam manufacturing factory at Histon adjacent to the Cambridge—St. Ives railway. As well as owning over 3,000 acres of land set aside for fruit growing, the firm also bought fruit from farmers in the surrounding area. Compared with the average fenland farmers these fruit growers enjoyed prosperity and at Cottenham the centre of the fruit growing area, the village maintained facilities more akin to a town with paved streets and gas lighting. To move these supplies of fruit it was proposed to lay a light railway from a junction near Oakington station to Cottenham, with possible extension to Haddenham under power of the Light Railway Act of 1896. On reflection of costs, estimated to be between £30,000 and £40,000, it was decided the horse waggon service, although slow and cumbersome, was adequate during the short fruit growing season and the idea was finally abandoned.

The GER Board initially approved of the terms of takeover of the Ely and St. Ives Railway on December 2nd 1896. The local Directors subject to the approval of the shareholders, agreed to sell their line for £128,000 receiving in exchange GER 4 per cent debentures. This arrangement was entirely acceptable to the debenture holders and shareholders of the Ely and St. Ives line, for as well as receiving an income equal to their existing arrangements, an additional £1,750 was available to meet outstanding expenses incurred in the winding up of the company.

At a special general meeting of the Ely and St. Ives Directors and proprietors held at Hamilton House, Bishopsgate on February 21st 1898, the gathering discussed the Bill presented to Parliament by the GER to enable the main line company to subscribe towards the Elsenham, Thaxted and Bardfield Light Railway and the Kelvedon, Tiptree and Tollesbury Light Railway and for the acquisition of the Ely and St. Ives, Ely and Newmarket, Colchester Stour Valley, Sudbury and Haverhill and Mellis and Eye Railway Companies. After resolving a few minor problems, the gathering approved of the takeover and the GER (General Powers) Bill 1898 received the Royal Assent on July 1st.

The Great Eastern Railway General Powers Act (61 & 62 Vic Cap LXVI) authorised the main line company to acquire the Ely and St. Ives Railway by raising £127,706 4 per cent debentures and exchanging them for Ely and St. Ives shares and debentures at the following rates. Holders of £100 Ely and St. Ives debentures were allotted £125 new debentures, £100 5 per cent stock exchanged for £125 new debenture stock and £100 4 per cent stock receiving £100 new debentures.

The last board meeting of the Ely and St. Ives Company held on Friday August 3rd 1898 was a somewhat sad occasion, for the death of John Suther-

land Valentine, the original Engineer of the EHSR and later chairman, was announced. Frederick Camps was elected chairman in his place but ultimately never chaired a meeting. The final expenditure incurred by the Company amounted to £134,835 13s 10d. To offset these outgoings the receipts of the advanced by the GER. The final total included £13,000 in payment of matured debentures and £5,129 13s 10d which was not repayable until the end of the 999 years lease.

During the First World War the Sutton branch carried a few additional trains for troops on training manoeuvres, whilst in common with many other East Anglian branches freight traffic experienced a period of relative prosperity as local farmers were urged to produce additional vegetables to replace the loss of food imported from abroad.

The immediate post-war period brought a rapid decline in passenger traffic which had always been of a secondary nature on the branch. The stations were unfortunately remote from the villages they were supposed to serve and in most cases the walk between village and station or return involved a climb as the stations were in the valley bottom and the settlements on the higher fenland ridge. Stretham and Wilburton suffered more than most being 1½d and 1 mile away from the village respectively. Haddenham and Sutton were slightly nearer whilst Earith Bridge served but a scattered community and Bluntisham was also half a mile away from the village.

With the advent of the internal combustion engine the roads from Ely to Sutton, Mepal and Somersham and Ely to Haddenham, Earith and St. Ives gained in importance. By 1919 the first local regular bus service was introduced and soon Ortona Motor Services of Cambridge were operating competitive bus services in the district served by the railway.

In December 1922 the GER, prior to amalgamation with the London and North Eastern Railway, attempted to counteract the loss of passenger receipts caused by the transfer of customers to the bus services. To reduce operating costs the conductor-guard method of working was introduced, although unlike the Eye, Dunmow and Bury St. Edmunds-Thetford branches no new halts were opened. On introduction of the revised working the booking offices at all branch stations, except Haddenham and Sutton, were closed for passenger work as all tickets were issued on the train by the guard. To enable the guard to collect fares whilst the train was travelling between stations, suitably modified six-wheel coaches were introduced with internal centre gangways and centre door at the end of each coach to enable the guard to walk between each coach. The normal formation of the branch train was a 3-coach set formed of a composite, a full third and a brake third.

Unfortunately whilst the new method reduced operating costs it failed to increase traffic at the branch stations.

The arrival of the local bus services was disastrous for the railway, only 426 passengers utilized Earith Bridge station for 6 months of 1923 with receipts of £24. Four years later only 649 passenger journeys were made during the whole year raising receipts to £62. Stretham fared even worse for during the first 6 months only 12 passengers used the station. Wilburton, the next station along the line, went months without a passenger joining or alighting. Sutton with 5,161 and Haddenham with 7,953 passengers in 1927 returned the best statistics but with the overall figure of less than 15,000 passenger

journeys per year or 288 passengers per week on average the LNER commenced investigations into the future of the passenger services.

The Divisional General Manager (Southern Area) duly reported to the LNER Traffic Committee on December 22nd 1930 that passenger traffic receipts on the Ely to St. Ives branch had gradually diminished and the gross value of traffic, local to, originating from or terminating on the branch amounted to only £7,562 in 1928. To offset this the line carried an appreciable amount of freight and indications were that the tonnage would increase.

In the interests of economy it was proposed to withdraw the passenger service from the line on and from 2nd February 1931 with the exception of one morning train from St. Ives to Ely which was necessary to convey milk and perishable produce. It was also intended to adjust the timing of goods trains in order to cater for parcels and miscellaneous traffic. To equip the line for freight working would involve signalling alterations and the provision of a petrol driven trolley for the permanent way department. The total cost of the work and provision of the trolley was estimated at £933.

The withdrawal of the passenger service after allowing for the loss of receipts estimated at £1,881 was expected to produce a net saving of £1,780. The traffic committee duly accepted the proposals and authorised the expenditure of £933.

Arrangements were subsequently made with Ortona Motor Services Ltd, later absorbed by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Co. Ltd, to provide an alternative public service. Ortona were already working a bus service between Ely and St. Ives, two days a week and with the closure of the line, agreed to provide a service each weekday augmented to two or three services each way. The buses were timed to connect with trains at both Ely and St. Ives. In addition Ortona arranged for their Sutton to Ely service to be extended from Ely City centre to the railway station to afford a connection with main line train services.

In comparison to railway closures in the 1950s and 1960s little opposition was made by local inhabitants and the replacement bus services, already used by the local populace without cars, were accepted.

The withdrawal of the train service from the branch received scant mention in the local press and as so few people used the trains little inconvenience was experienced.

Soon after closure, the LNER shut the signal-boxes at Sutton Bridge Junction, Stretham, Wilburton, Haddenham, Earith Bridge and Bluntisham. To save costs the signal-box at Needingworth was only manned for 12 hours and was fitted with a switching-out key for the main line.

In the late 1920s and 1930s the branch was at its busiest between June and November. During this period train loads of fruit pickers, often Londoners taking working holidays, were conveyed by special trains to the branch stations where they were picked up by local farmers and conveyed by carts and covered horse vans and primitive motor lorries to their temporary camps in the orchards and fields. The efforts of the pickers was evident by the continual loading of fruit produce in vans and wagons at Sutton, Haddenham and other stations ready for the booked freight or special goods trains to convey the produce to market. The station yards were a constant hive of industry with the unloading of the fen tumbrels and tipping carts.

During the 1930s until the outbreak of World War Two goods traffic continued to be conveyed by two freight trains daily which ran weekdays only in each direction. Milk and parcels traffic previously conveyed by passenger trains was carried in the van attached to all freight trains. In the late 1920s sugar beet was introduced into the area and during the winter months a considerable tonnage was conveyed to the beet factory at Ely. Other items included cattle and livestock, building material, manure, agricultural components and above all fruit traffic which flourished in the summer months. Passenger trains continued to use the line in connection with specials or excursions and on a few occasions, trains were diverted across the line after a mishap or during engineering work on the main lines. A passenger coach was also attached to the first up train on Mondays and return afternoon freight, for the convenience of Drovers attending St. Ives market.

The approach of World War Two brought an increase in materials conveyed to Sutton for forwarding to the RAF airfield at Mepal and during hostilities occasional passenger trains conveyed military personnel for the airfield. Bluntisham and Earith Bridge goods yards were also used for traffic destined for Somersham airfield when that station was overstretched. It was during this period that ammunition trains served the yard at Sutton, mostly travelling at night before bombs and shells were removed to ammunition sites by road. Rationing of petrol also brought the withdrawal of many vans and lorries from local roads and the urgency of foodstuffs meant an increase in freight traffic leaving the branch stations for London and major cities.

After the war fruit, parcels and milk traffic quickly transferred to road and gradually other items were lost from the railway. The remaining imports of coal and coke and exports of sugar beet were easily handled by the one freight train which ran each way weekdays, latterly Saturdays excepted.

Road transport with its door-to-door service went from strength to strength in East Anglia and soon coal merchants were receiving an increased tonnage of fuel by road. By 1962 sugar beet was also conveyed direct from the farms to the sugar beet factory. Fruit traffic had travelled by road to markets from the early 1950s and consequently the St. Ives Ely freight conveyed few wagons for the branch station yards.

Two annual booked excursions ran across from St. Ives to Ely *en route* for Yarmouth and Hunstanton until 1958 but from 1955 their future was in the balance as the track and permanent way between Sutton and Earith had deteriorated. After consultation with the civil engineers the excursions were allowed across this section subject to a speed limit of 10 mph.

The section from Bluntisham through Earith Bridge to Sutton was closed to all traffic on and from October 6th 1958, and the track lifted through Earith Bridge station, the section to Sutton was then used as a siding. The line was then divided into two sections. Needingworth Junction to Bluntisham and Sutton to Ely. The eastern end of the line remained open for a further 6 years handling the dwindling sugar beet and vegetable traffic until services were withdrawn on and from July 13th 1964. Bluntisham yard and mill provided a considerable amount of traffic via St. Ives but it was considered uneconomical to retain the section open and the traffic was subsequently withdrawn and the line closed from October 5th 1964.

The track of the Ely to St. Ives branch remained for some months before

contractors cut up the rails, removed sleepers and other fixed assets. Today most of the trackbed has reverted to farmland or because of its raised position above the surrounding fenland, as access roads. Little evidence is available for the discerning traveller to distinguish the former trackbed on the site of Ely, Sutton Branch Junction. The stations at Stretham, Wilburton, Haddenham, and Bluntisham remain but are now used as private residencies.

CHAPTER II – THE ROUTE DESCRIBED

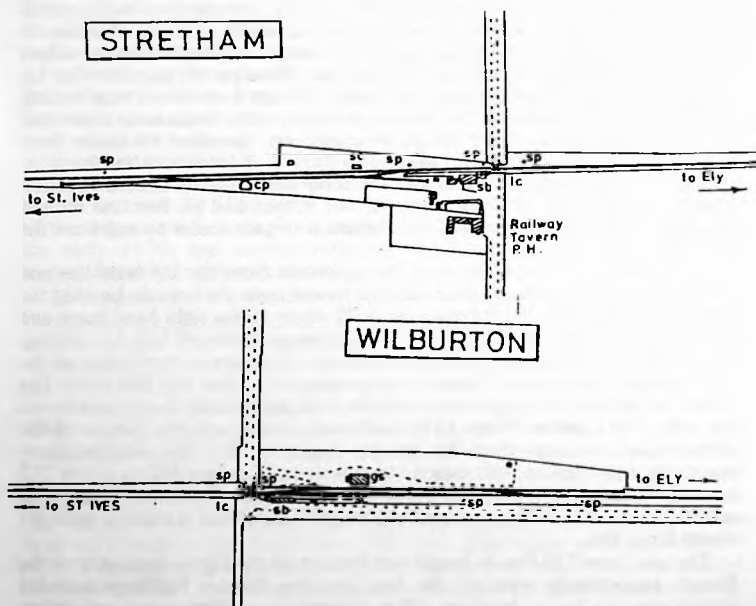
Ely station, 70 miles 33 chains from Liverpool Street on the ex-GER –Kings Lynn main line was the junction for the Sutton Branch trains. The layout at Ely consists of a Down platform served by a loop line and an Up side island platform. The Down or western platform is host to the main station offices including station-master's office, booking office, general and ladies waiting rooms, toilets and parcels office. The Up side platform building consists of staff rooms, waiting room, toilets and small refreshment room. In GER and LNER days the St. Ives train usually departed from the island platform using the Up main or Up loop line. Leaving the platform the Up main line was followed as far as Ely Sutton Branch Junction, 1 mile 1 chain south of Ely station. From Ely station to the junction, trains were controlled by Ely South and Ely Dock Junction signalboxes, the latter 56 chains from Ely station and the junction for the line to Bury St. Edmunds. After the withdrawal of the passenger services and the abolition of Sutton Branch Junction signalbox from July 1932 all trains for the Sutton and St. Ives line utilised the Down reception line from Dock Junction to gain access to and from the Branch.

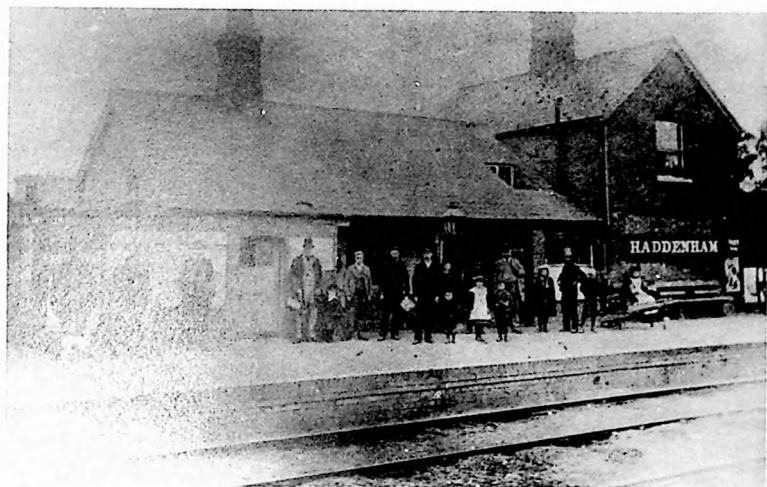
At Ely Sutton Branch Junction, facing points from the Up main line and trailing points to the Down main line led to and from the branch. Leaving the main line the Branch curved away on a 22 chain radius right hand curve and followed a straight course on short undulating gradients of 1 in 352 falling/182 rising/207 falling past Bedham Farm on the Down or north side of the line. Approaching Thetford Corner, the gradient altered to 1 in 274 rising. The course of the railway then swung on a 40 chain radius right hand curve across the main A10 London–Kings Lynn road level crossing and past the site of the controversial crossings when the line was inspected. The line continued curving to the right before following a straight westerly course falling at 1 in 212 across fenland fields before crossing the Stretham–Witchford Road level crossing on a 1 in 432 rising gradient to enter Stretham station, 2 miles 61 chains from Ely.

The platform 220 feet in length was located on the Up or south side of the Branch immediately west of the level crossing. Station buildings included station-master's house, booking office, waiting room, lamp room and toilets whilst over the platform was a small canopy for the protection of passengers. The station and platforms were lit by oil. The track layout consisted of a

goods loop on the Up side of the main single line west of the station. This served a cattle pen and coal ground and access was offered by facing points in both directions from the main single line. At each end of the loop were refuge sidings or shunting necks, the eastern one being utilised in later years for the loading of sugar beet. Points and signals at Stretham were controlled from the Station signalbox, situated on the Down side of the line opposite the goods loop. The station was rather isolated and exposed to the elements especially if a north or east wind blew across the fens and during these periods it often required two or three attempts to light the platform oil lamps. Stretham village was over $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south of the railway and passenger traffic was never heavy. The only building in the vicinity of the station was the Railway Tavern whose owner also acted as the local coal merchant.

Beyond Stretham the Branch continued climbing at 1 in 432 around a slight right hand curve to follow a straight course across fenland known as the Valley Bottom or The Pools. Three occupational crossings were passed as the line fell initially at 1 in 951 before rising again at 1 in 327 as the fen island ridge closed in to the south of the railway. Soon after passing Grunty Fen crossing, the gradient changed to 1 in 223 falling/249 rising and 382 falling as the railway ran parallel to a side road on the Up side of the line before entering Wilburton station, 4 miles 56 chains from Ely.





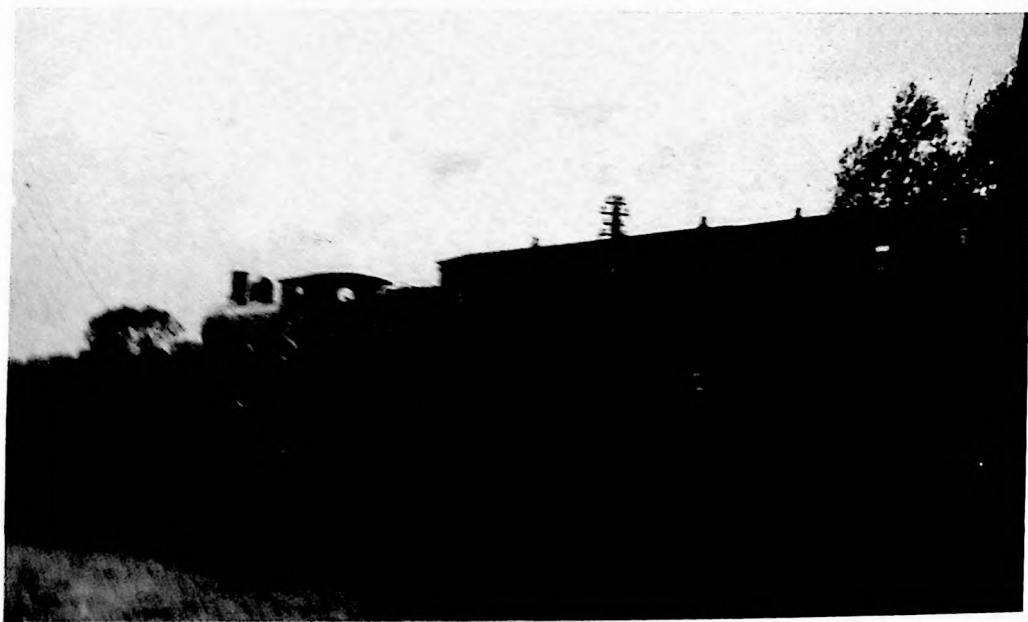
Haddenham station in the 1890s, showing the station-master's house later replaced by a new structure in 1900 (Cambridgeshire Library).



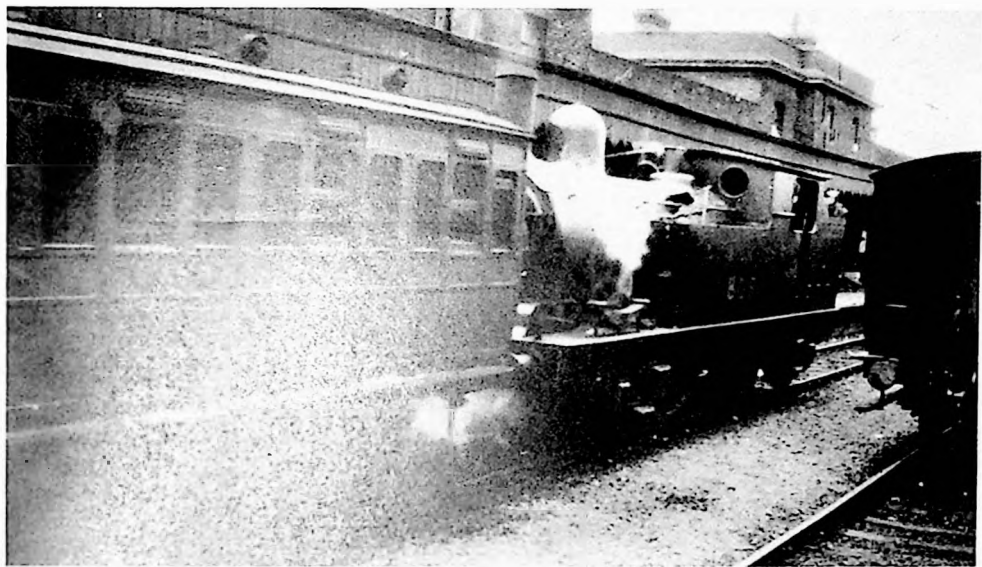
Sutton station and crossing loop in the 1890s, facing Ely (Cambridgeshire Library).



The type of 3rd class carriage in use in the early days of the Branch; compartment partitions are only half height. Built by the Gloucester Carriage & Wagon Co. (Courtesy Historical Model Railway Society).



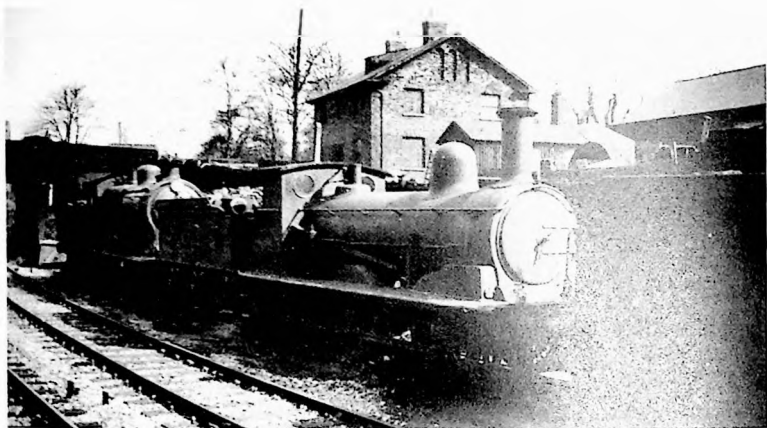
An 'Intermediate' 2-6-2, as used for many years on the Branch, shown in recent historical days somewhere in East Anglia.



An F3 class 2-4-2T No. 8061 pulling into Ely with a train from St. Ives in 1927 (J.E. Kite).



An F3 class 2-4-2T in original GER livery.



The J15 class 0-6-0 was a common sight on the Branch; this one, No. 7553, was photographed at Bishops Stortford in April 1931 (R.W. Kidner).



Wilburton station facing St. Ives; the canopy is raised at a rakish angle over the narrow platform to clear the carriage roofs (J. Watling).



The large ornate corn shed at Wilburton, built in 1868 at a cost of £150 for storing farmers' grain awaiting transit (J. Watling).



Bluntisham station house, booking office and store (J. Watling).



Earith Bridge station, an example of the larger buildings on the St. Ives extension; facing Ely (J. Watling).



Stretham station house, facing Ely (J. Watling).



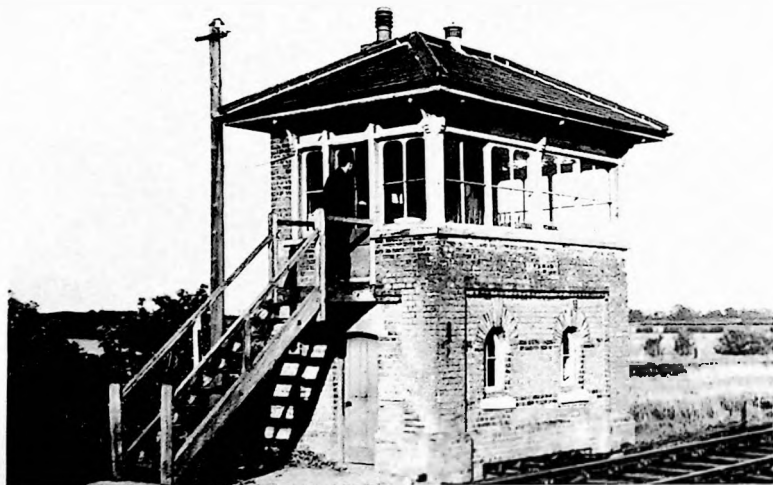
Haddenham station and yard, facing St. Ives, showing the 1900 station-master's house (J. Watling).



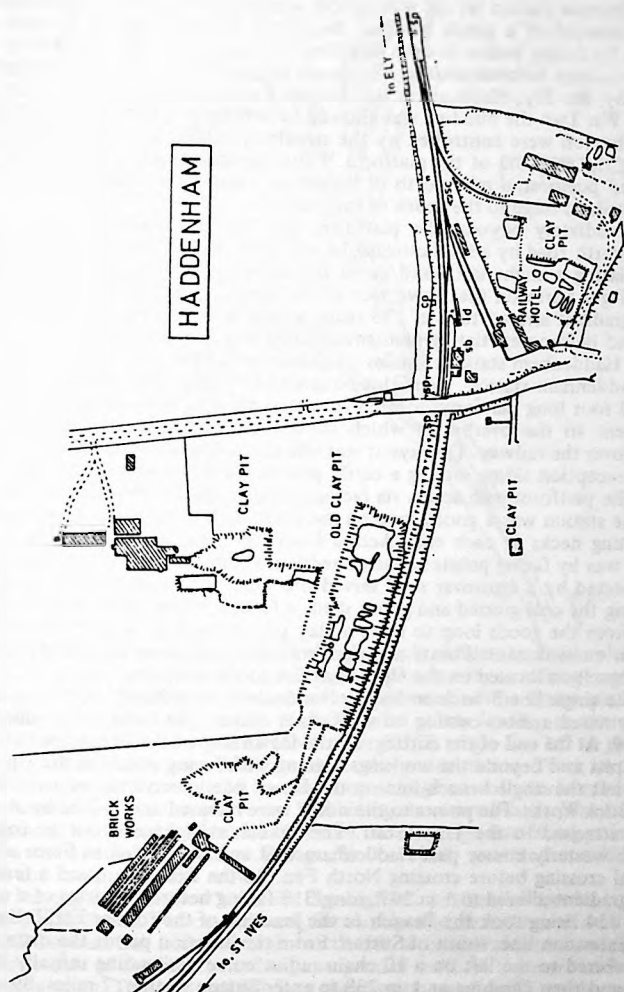
Haddenham Goods Shed, also used for storing grain (J. Watling).



J17 0-6-0 No. 65548 standing at Haddenham with the Ely to St. Ives freight in 1959 (M. Delanoy Collection).



Sutton signalbox, typical of boxes on the St. Ives extension. This had an 18-lever Saxby & Farmer frame (J. Watling).



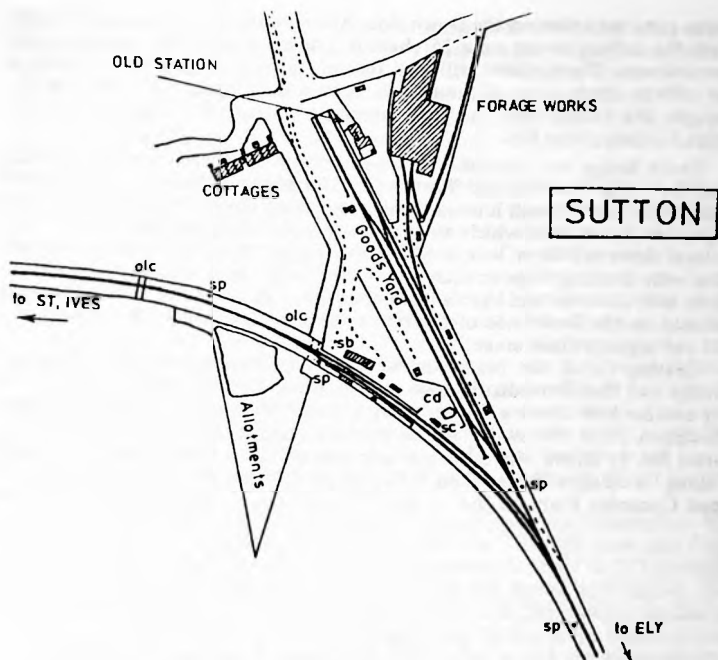
Wilburton station layout was almost identical to Stretham. The track layout consisted of a goods loop on the Down or north side of the line with access by facing points in each direction. At each end of the goods loop were refuge sidings or head shunts. The goods loop served a goods shed originally built by the Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway as a grain store but after World War Two the building was allowed to deteriorate. The points and signals at Wilburton were controlled by the signalbox situated on the Up side of the line at the east end of the platform. Wilburton station was also situated in an isolated position, a mile north of Wilburton village which was located on the high fenland ridge to the south of the railway.

Immediately beyond the platform, the Branch crossed the Wilburton-Wentworth road by a level crossing before climbing initially at 1 in 165. After negotiating a slight left hand curve the railway followed a straight section, past Tiger Farm on the Down side of the line, on a 1 in 426 falling gradient. The gradient altered to 1 in 173 rising as the Branch crossed the edge of the fenland before negotiating gradients of 1 in 931 falling at 1 in 161 rising to enter Haddenham station, 5 miles 64 chains from Ely.

Haddenham station, some three-quarters of a mile north of the village had a 230 foot long platform, located on the south side of the single Branch line adjacent to the overbridge which carried the Haddenham-Chatteris main road over the railway. The layout was one of the largest on the Branch, with a long reception siding serving a cattle pen on the Down side of the line, opposite the platform with access via facing points in the Up direction. To the east of the station was a goods loop on the south side of the main single line with shunting necks at each end. Access from the main single line to the goods loop was by facing points in each direction. From the goods loop, two sidings connected by a crossover road served the yard, the southernmost siding also serving the coal ground and goods shed. A further siding installed in the 1880s ran from the goods loop to serve a clay pit, crossing in its path marshy land by an embankment. Points and signals at Haddenham were controlled from the signalbox located on the Up side of the goods loop line.

The single line Branch on leaving Haddenham passed under the road bridge and entered a short cutting on a 40 chain radius right hand curve falling at 1 in 779. At the end of the cutting, on the Down side of the line, were extensive clay pits and beyond the workings a siding with facing points in the Up direction left the single branch line on the Down side to serve the adjacent Isle of Ely Brick Works. The points to the siding were released and locked by Annetts Key attached to the Train Staff. The Branch straightened out to follow a north westerly course past Haddenham End and over Salmons Farm occupational crossing before crossing North Fen. As the Branch crossed a fen drain the gradient altered to 1 in 247 rising/318 falling before a quarter of a mile at 1 in 434 rising took the Branch to the junction of the former EHSR line and the extension line, south of Sutton. From the junction points the main single line veered to the left on a 10 chain radius curve descending initially at 1 in 220 and then climbing at 1 in 238 to enter Sutton station, 7 miles, 39 chains from Ely.

The station was situated half a mile south east of the town, known locally as Sutton in the Isle, and was the first Train Staff and Ticket station after Ely Sutton Branch Junction box and boasted a crossing loop. The Up platform



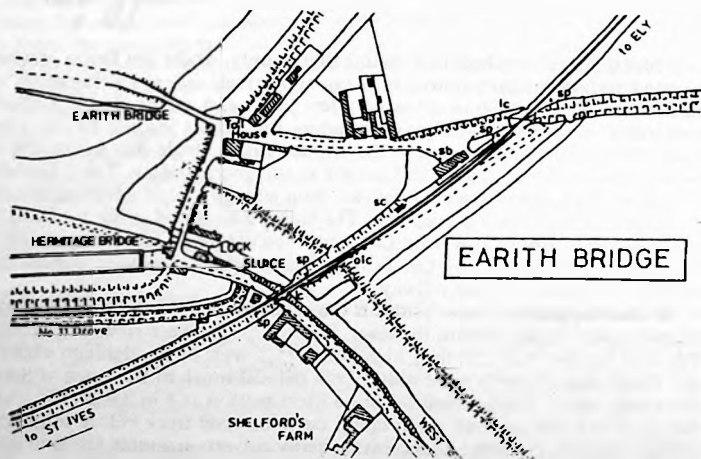
250 feet in length was host to a waiting shelter only, whilst the Down platform boasted station master's house, booking and parcels office, waiting room and staff room. The signal-box, situated a few yards east of the Down platform, controlled all points and signals including the points leading to the goods yard. From the junction points the former EHSR single line led to the old Sutton station which from 1878 served as the goods station. Track layout in the goods yard was completed by two loop sidings one of which terminated at the second old station platform. The siding also served cattle pens and the coal ground of Coote & Warren Ltd. From the old single line facing points on the Down side led to Drakes Forge Works which provided considerable traffic and revenue for the railway.

On leaving Sutton "new" station the single branch line followed a straight course across South Fen on the level. On the Up side were views of the North Fen and beyond the 120 foot high North Hill, west of Haddenham whilst on the Down side of the line the railway ran parallel south of the town of Sutton for a mile or so. The gradient fell for a short section at 1 in 330 as the branch swung to the left on a 45 chain radius curve on level track before following a straight section, crossing and recrossing many culverts spanning fen land drainage dykes. The branch then began climbing at 1 in 5280 for 2½ miles as the high embankments guarding the New Bedford level or One Hundred Foot

Drain came into view on the Down side. After a mile and a quarter of straight track the railway swung on a 25 chain left hand curve to run parallel to the embankment. The gradient stiffened to 1 in 88 for three quarters of a mile as the railway climbed out of South Fen. A final short rising section at 1 in 220 brought the branch over the level crossing — into Earith Bridge station, 11 miles 55 chains from Ely.

Earith Bridge was located in a cramped position between the level crossing and the bridge over the Old West River. The platform located on the Down side of the single branch line was host to the usual station buildings. The track layout at this station, which was originally to be called 'The Hermitage' after a local sluice and farm, was completed by a goods loop on the Up side of the line with shunting traps at each end. Entry to the loop was by facing points from each direction and signals and points were controlled from the signalbox located on the Down side of the branch west of the station. The yard had a 10 cwt capacity fixed crane.

Leaving Earith the branch crossed the Old West River by a substantial bridge and then immediately bisected the Long Stanton—Earith B1050 road by another level crossing. Immediately beyond this crossing the branch passed Shelfords Farm and swung to the right on a sharp 20 chain radius curve to cross No. 11 Drove where the gradient changed from level track to 1 in 660 falling. A straight course then followed as the railway climbed at 1 in 132 past Cranesfen Farm on the Up side of the line to cross the viaduct over the



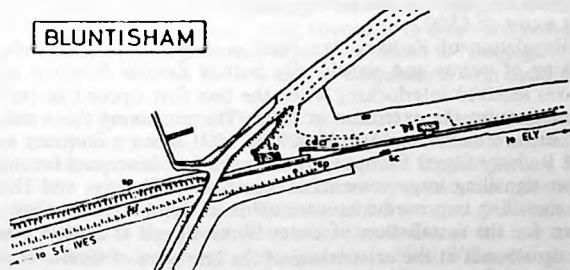
River Ouse on the level. This structure was the most substantial item of civil engineering on the Branch and was used as a landmark by RAF crews approaching Mepal or Somersham airfields during and after World War Two.

Away from the viaduct the Branch dipped for a short section of 1 in 200 across an embankment above the fenland before climbing for half a mile at 1 in 203 curving slightly to the left past the hamlet of Little London to enter Bluntisham station, 13 miles, 53 chains from Ely.

The station served the villages of Bluntisham and Colne, $\frac{1}{2}$ and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north respectively. The platform 230 feet long was situated on the Down side of the line between the goods loop to the east and the overbridge carrying the A1123 road over the railway to the west. The platform had the same offices as other stations. Bluntisham was the second Train Staff and Ticket station on the Branch and had a loop line on the Down or north side of the main single line east of the station. At the west end of the loop a short siding served a cattle dock and pens whilst the siding to the east served a coal ground. Alongside the loop the railway company erected a goods shed. Because of the restricted clearance of this shed it was only permissible to pass a goods and a passenger train at Bluntisham and not two passenger trains. This unofficial instruction also required the goods train to be shunted in the loop siding to allow the passenger train to pass on the single line. The points and signals were controlled from the station signalbox located on the Up side of the line opposite the loop.

Leaving Bluntisham the Sutton Branch passed under the Huntingdon–Ely A1123 road and entered a short cutting falling at 1 in 203. Emerging from the cutting the railway climbed across an embankment on a 1 in 203 gradient. Further undulating sections through a cutting and across open arable land falling initially at 1 in 220 and then climbing at 1 in 203 brought the line to Needingworth Junction, 15 miles 64 chains from Ely where the Branch joined the March–St. Ives line. A descent of $\frac{1}{2}$ mile at 1 in 214 and on undulating section at 1 in 314 rising, 1 in 1120/792/566 falling brought the Branch train to St. Ives, 17 miles, 55 chains from Ely. The section from Needingworth Junction to St. Ives was GER but north of Needingworth to March the line was part of the Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint line.

The speed limit on the Branch for many years was 30 mph although after 1957 a restriction of 10 mph was in force between Bluntisham and Sutton because of the poor condition of the permanent way.



CHAPTER III — OPERATING AND TRAFFIC

The initial permanent way of the EHSR was of double-headed rails, weighing 65 lbs per yard in 21 foot lengths, fishplated at the joints by 16 inch, 4 hole plates. The sleepers were of baltic timber half round in shape and measuring 8 feet by 9 inches by 4½ inches laid 2 feet apart at the rail joints and 3 feet 2 inches apart at intermediate places. The rails were affixed to the sleepers by fang bolts at the joints and a mixture of wood screws and dog spikes elsewhere. The permanent way was laid on a mixture of sand and gravel ballast, 9 inches in depth. Captain Tyler on his inspection remarked of the similarity in permanent way of the EHSR and the West Norfolk Junction Railway, both the work of W. Simpson.

The permanent way provided for the extension between Sutton and Needingworth was originally to be of 75 lbs per yard flat bottom track but because of the requirement for stronger rails, 80 lbs per yard double head rails in 24 feet lengths were laid. The rails were fishplated at the joints and laid on cast iron chairs weighing 26 lbs each. The chairs were fixed by spiked trenails to sleepers of red fir measuring 8 feet 11 inches by 10 inches by 5 inches, 8 sleepers bearing each length of track. The ballast was again formed of sand and gravel, 9 inches in depth below sleeper level on ordinary track and on embankments but 15 inches deep in cuttings.

The original gravel ballast was soon replaced by clinker and ash formation. Secondhand track of GER 80–85 lbs per yard replaced the original rails and after amalgamation, the LNER laid 87–92 lbs per yard bull-head track. Ashes and clinker were received from the Motive Power Depots of the GER/LNER but after the 1920s the British Sugar Corporation factories at Ely and Wisington occasionally supplied wagon loads.

Signalling on the Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway consisted of a station signal at each of the stations, and distant signals at Sutton Branch Junction and Sutton, supplied and installed by Messrs Stevens. When the extension was opened, Tyers single needle block telegraph was installed in each of the new signalboxes. Signalling equipment, signalboxes, frames, and signals were supplied by Saxby and Farmer Ltd. Soon after opening of the extension level crossing gatehouses were supplied with block repeater bells. The single needle telegraph was installed at each station to assist communication whilst the junction and station signalboxes were supplied with a circuit phone at a cost of £500.

The Regulation of Railway Act 1889 amongst other things required the interlocking of points and signals. Ely Sutton Branch Junction and Sutton signalboxes received interlocking when the line first opened to traffic as did the signalboxes on the extension in 1878. The remaining three stations were without such refinements until April 21st 1891 when a contract was placed with the Railway Signal Company of Fazackerley, Liverpool for interlocking and other signalling improvements at Stretham, Wilburton and Haddenham. Further signalling improvements were made in October 1894 when authority was given for the installation of outer home signals at Sutton costing £30.

The signalboxes at the eastern end of the line were of timber construction. Sutton Branch Junction boasted a 20 lever frame with no spare levers whilst

both Stretham and Wilburton had 20 lever frames with 15 working and 5 spare levers. Haddenham signalbox serving a larger track layout had a 24 lever frame with 18 working and 6 spare levers. The remaining signalboxes on the Branch were built of brick to the standard Saxby and Farmer design. Sutton had an 18 lever frame with 15 working and 3 spare levers whilst Earith Bridge boasted the smallest frame on the line with 12 levers, 10 working and 2 spares. Bluntisham signalbox had a 16 lever frame with 10 working and 6 spares whilst Needingworth Junction had the same size frame but with 12 working and 4 spare levers.

In GER days the signalboxes at Needingworth Junction, Bluntisham, Earith Bridge, Sutton, Haddenham, Wilburton and Stretham were open for the Sutton Branch trains shown in the working timetable and for Branch trains specially advised whilst Sutton Branch Junction signalbox was open from 6.00 a.m. (5.30 a.m. on Mondays) to 9.00 p.m. weekdays only.

In 1928, after the LNER had taken over, Ely Sutton Branch Junction signalbox was open from 6.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. weekdays only whilst Needingworth Junction box opened from 7.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. on weekdays. The other signalboxes were only open for the passage of Branch trains or trains specially advised. By this date Porter/Signalman were operating the signalboxes at Stretham, Wilburton, Haddenham and Earith Bridge and to save delays the signalbox circuit phones at these stations were transferred to the station buildings.

After the withdrawal of the passenger train service in 1931, the signalboxes remained in use for only a short period. Sutton Branch Junction 'box was closed on July 17th 1932 when arrangements were made to pass the Branch traffic over the Down reception line between Ely Dock Junction signalbox and the site of the Junction. Stretham, Earith Bridge and Bluntisham signalboxes were abolished from August 17th 1932 with the points to the goods yards being worked by ground frame released by Annetts Key attached to the train staff. At the same time all signals except gate distants were removed. Less than a month later on September 7th 1932 the signalboxes at Wilburton and Haddenham were abolished and replaced by ground frames. Sutton signalbox remained in use as a Train Staff station until the withdrawal of the freight services. It was finally abolished on June 16th 1965.

The Ely to Sutton section was originally worked by one engine in steam method but with the opening of the extension, Train Staff and Ticket working was introduced with three sections Ely—Sutton, Sutton—Bluntisham, Bluntisham—Needingworth Junction. The single line Staffs utilised on the Branch were Sutton Branch Junction to Sutton, triangular in shape and coloured red, Sutton to Bluntisham hexagonal and blue, Bluntisham to Needingworth Junction square and yellow. The Tickets used in conjunction with the Staffs were similar in colour.

The advent of the railway in the district failed to stop the movement of population away from this area of the fens. The decline was gradual and reflected in the sparse train service operated between Ely and St. Ives. Between 1871 and 1931 when full passenger services operated the population of Stretham declined by 19 per cent, Wilburton 14.3 per cent, Haddenham 15.6 per cent and Sutton 9.5 per cent. Even after the closure of the line to passenger traffic the decline continued although later in 1961 Wilburton showed an increase of 28.9 per cent.

The initial timetable for April 1866 showed three passenger trains in each direction with 30 minutes allowed for the $7\frac{1}{4}$ mile journey. The full timetable weekdays only was

		1.2.3 a.m.	1.2 p.m.	1.2 p.m.
Ely	dep	10.50	1.55	7.15
Stretham	dep	11.00	2.05	7.25
Wilburton	dep	11.08	2.13	7.33
Haddenham	dep	11.15	2.20	7.40
Sutton	arr	11.20	2.25	7.45
		1.2.3 a.m.	1.2 p.m.	1.2.3 p.m.
Sutton	dep	8.10	12.5	5.35
Haddenham	dep	8.17	12.12	5.42
Wilburton	dep	8.22	12.17	5.47
Stretham	dep	8.30	12.25	5.55
Ely	arr	8.40	12.35	6.05

An additional train ran on Thursdays only to Ely for the market, departing Sutton at 2.00 p.m. and returning from Ely at 5.00 p.m. The following year the full weekly time-table remained unaltered but the Thursdays only train departed Sutton at the later time of 2.35 p.m. and returned from Ely at the earlier time of 4.45 p.m.

With the opening of the extension from Sutton to St. Ives the following service of five passenger trains ran in each direction conveying first, second and third class accommodation

		a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Ely	dep	6.10	9.20	1.55	4.20	7.15
Stretham	dep	6.20	9.30	x	x	x
Wilburton	dep	6.28	9.38	x	x	x
Haddenham	dep	6.36	9.55	2.12	4.37	7.32
Sutton	dep	6.50	10.13	2.17	4.42	7.37
Earith Bridge	dep	7.02	10.21	x	x	x
Bluntisham	dep	7.10	10.38	2.32	4.57	7.52
St. Ives	arr	7.20	10.50	2.40	5.05	8.00

x calls if required

In the Down direction the timetable was

		a.m.	a.m.	MTHO p.m.	p.m.
St. Ives	dep	7.30	11.30	3.00	5.25
Bluntisham	dep	7.38	11.39	3.11	5.34
Earith Bridge	dep	x	11.44	3.18	5.38
Sutton	dep	7.53	11.55	3.32	5.50
Haddenham	dep	7.58	12.01	3.40	5.56
Wilburton	dep	x	12.05	3.45	6.00
Stretham	dep	x	12.11	3.52	6.06
Ely	arr	8.15	12.20	4.00	6.15

x calls if required

By 1886 the Up service consisted of 4 passenger trains daily with an additional train on Mondays and Thursdays for St. Ives and Ely markets.

Trains departed Ely 6.05 a.m., 9.20 a.m.MO, 9.30 a.m.MX, 2.05 p.m.SX calling at Wilburton and Earith Bridge by request 2.05 p.m.SO calling all stations 4.37 p.m.MTHO and 7.10 p.m. In the Down direction 4 trains ran weekdays only departing St. Ives at 7.30 a.m., 11.30 a.m.MTHX, 12.47 p.m.MTHO calling at Wilburton by request 3.00 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. Journey times for the 17 miles 66 chains journey varied from 44 to 60 minutes.

In 1894 the passenger service on the Branch had been reduced to 3 trains in each direction with an additional train each way on Mondays and Thursdays. Departures from Ely were 9.25 a.m., 2.05 p.m. calling at Wilburton and Earith Bridge by request, 4.05 p.m.MTHO calling at Stretham and Wilburton by request and 7.10 p.m. Down services departed St. Ives at 7.30 a.m. calling at Wilburton if required 11.30 a.m.MTHX, 12.47 p.m.MTHO, 3.15 p.m.MTHO and 5.30 p.m. Journey times were now more uniform and varied between 42 and 45 minutes.

The working timetable for 1908 showed the following Up services with departures from Ely: at 6.00 a.m., Express Cattle MO, 9.35 a.m., 10.30 a.m. goods to Ramsey 2.15 p.m., 2.18 p.m. goods to Peterborough via Chatteris, 4.19 p.m.MTHO and 7.10 p.m. passenger to Godmanchester. The 6.00 a.m. cattle ran as a class B train as it conveyed a passenger carriage for the use of drovers whilst the 2.15 p.m. passenger on Thursdays and Saturdays was permitted to work cattle traffic from Ely to St. Ives if the truck was fitted with Westinghouse brake pipes. A carriage truck was also conveyed by this train to work fruit traffic for the north from the Branch stations. The 2.18 p.m. goods was a through working train from Cambridge SX departing at 11.25 a.m.

Down services departed St. Ives at 7.30 a.m., 7.40 a.m.LEMO, 11.35 a.m. MTHX, 12.50 p.m.MTHO, 3.15 p.m.MTHO, 5.23 p.m., 5.27 p.m. Express Cattle to Norwich MO and 6.15 p.m. goods ex-Ramsey. The light engine was allowed to work through cattle traffic when required whilst the 5.27 p.m. Express Cattle ran as a class B train as it conveyed a carriage for the use of drovers. This train called at Haddenham and Stretham to leave cattle only.

By 1916 the Up services ex-Ely were: 6.00 a.m. Express Cattle MO which continued to convey a carriage for the use of drovers and consequently ran as a class B train. Other departures were 9.46 a.m., 10.20 a.m. goods through to Warboys, 12.40 p.m.MTHX, 1.55 p.m.MTHO, 4.25 p.m. through to Huntingdon East, 6.08 p.m. goods to Sutton and 6.43 p.m. passenger through to Cambridge via St. Ives. The 4.25 p.m. was permitted to work one wagon of cattle from Ely to St. Ives if the truck was fitted with Westinghouse brake pipes and also conveyed a carriage truck for fruit traffic from the Branch stations for destinations in the north. The 6.43 p.m. to Cambridge was also allowed to work cattle between Ely and St. Ives on Thursdays and Saturdays only if the truck was fitted with the Westinghouse brake. Trains departed St. Ives at 7.38 a.m., 7.50 a.m.LEMO, 11.11 a.m.MTHX, 12.51 p.m.MTHO, 3.22 p.m., 5.15 p.m. (4.44 p.m. ex-Huntingdon East), 6.20 p.m. goods ex-Warboys and 7.15 p.m. goods Sutton to Ely. The light engine was allowed to work cattle traffic when necessary whilst the 6.20 p.m. goods called at stations Sutton to Stretham to detach wagons and pick up brake goods only.

After World War One the service for 1921 showed reduced overall service with departures from Ely at 6.00 a.m.MO Express Cattle, 9.45 a.m., 10.20 a.m. goods ex-March returning to Whitemoor via St. Ives, 12.40 p.m.MTHX,

2.18 p.m.MTHO, 4.38 p.m. through passenger to Huntingdon and 6.47 p.m. through train to Cambridge. On Thursdays and Saturdays the later train was permitted to work cattle between Ely and St. Ives if the truck was fitted with Westinghouse brakes. Down services departed St. Ives at 7.33 a.m. (a through train from Cambridge), 11.11 a.m.MTHO, 12.51 p.m.MTHX, 3.22 p.m., 5.25 p.m. (through train from Huntingdon) and 5.45 p.m. goods (a through train from March).

By 1928 under the LNER the service had altered and in the Up direction from Ely the express cattle no longer ran but was replaced by a goods train departing at 7.05 a.m.MO although the train continued to convey a carriage for drovers. Other departures from the Cathedral city were 9.45 a.m., 10.20 a.m. goods, 2.00 p.m.MTHO, 4.38 p.m. passenger to Huntingdon East and 6.49 p.m. passenger through to Cambridge via St. Ives. The latter train was permitted to work cattle traffic if the wagon was Westinghouse fitted. The 10.20 a.m. goods by this time was worked by Ely enginemen and guard. The first Down train continued as a through service from Cambridge and departed St. Ives at 7.17 a.m. Other departures from the Huntingdonshire town were 12.15 p.m. THO, 12.45 p.m.MO, 3.10 p.m. 3.30 p.m.SO goods, 5.26 p.m. (through train from Huntingdon East) and 6.10 p.m.SX goods.

The final passenger timetable in 1931 was evidence of the decline of traffic with 3 trains in each direction with an additional working on Mondays and Thursdays only. Departures from Ely were at 9.45 a.m., 2.00 p.m.MTHO, 4.38 p.m. and 6.49 p.m. whilst Down services departed St. Ives at 7.19 a.m., 12.15 p.m.THO, 12.45 p.m.MO, 3.10 p.m. and 5.23 p.m. Timings were extended and varied between 43 and 58 minutes.

In 1939 the freight service consisted of two departures from St. Ives, 7.18 a.m. Milk and Parcels train, a through train from Cambridge departed at 6.42 a.m., and 4.10 p.m. goods. In the Up direction trains departed Ely at 7.00 a.m.MO if required (this train continued to have a passenger carriage attached for the use of drovers) and 9.30 a.m. goods calling all stations on the Branch. In addition, a short working from Ely to Sutton and return ran if required departing Ely at 4.00 p.m. calling all stations and returning from Sutton at 6.10 p.m. calling at Haddenham only.

By the summer of 1952 the Branch was served by one goods train in each direction. Running as a class K, the Up freight departed Ely at 10.30 a.m. and shunted at all stations, 5 minutes being allowed at Stretham, 10 minutes at Wilburton, 15 minutes at Haddenham, 38 minutes at Sutton, 15 minutes at Earith Bridge and 18 minutes at Bluntisham. After passing Needingworth Junction at 1.15 p.m. arrival at St. Ives was 5 minutes later. The Down freight ran as a class F, departing St. Ives at 2.15 p.m. again calling at all stations. The times allowed for shunting were Bluntisham 12 minutes, Earith Bridge 10 minutes, Sutton 25 minutes, Haddenham 15 minutes, Wilburton 15 minutes and Stretham 12 minutes. Ely Dock Junction was passed at 4.38 p.m. and arrival in Ely Goods Yard was 2 minutes later. Parcels, miscellaneous traffic and live stock at passenger train rates were also conveyed by these goods services.

With the closure of the Bluntisham to Sutton section from October 6th 1958 the line was split into two sections for operating purposes. In 1961 a class H freight train served Bluntisham, departing St. Ives at 10.00 a.m.SO

and 1.30 p.m.SX, the latter a through train from Histon departing 12.40 p.m. The return workings departed Bluntisham at 1.20 p.m.SO and 3.00 p.m.SX and were allowed 20 to 23 minutes for the journey. Stretham, Wilburton, Haddenham and Sutton were served by one class K freight in each direction, departing Ely at 1.25 p.m.SX calling at intermediate stations by request and arriving at Sutton 2.39 p.m. The return working departed Sutton at 3.00 p.m. SX and was booked to shunt at each intermediate station before arriving at Ely at 4.30 p.m. This train was allowed 14 minutes for shunting at Haddenham, 10 minutes at Wilburton and 16 minutes at Stretham. The freight services remained essentially unaltered until the section from Sutton to Ely was closed on July 13th 1964 and Bluntisham to Needingworth Junction on October 5th 1964.

The running times allowed for freight trains along the branch after World War Two were:

Between	St. Ives to Ely (Down)		Ely to St. Ives (Up)	
	Class F minutes	Class HJK minutes	Class F minutes	Class HJK minutes
St. Ives—Bluntisham	10	13	9	11
Bluntisham—Earith Bridge	3	4	4	5
Earith Bridge—Sutton	8	11	8	12
Sutton—Haddenham	3	4	2	3
Haddenham—Wilburton	2	2	2	3
Wilburton—Stretham	3	4	4	5
Stretham—Ely	8	10	9	11

The initial goods traffic conveyed by the EHSR consisted of potatoes and other root crops and wheat grown in great abundance in the rich fertile loam of the fens, whilst imports consisted mainly of manure for the farmers and coal for domestic and agricultural use. When Oliver Pell died he was succeeded by A.J. Pell who developed 5 acres of land for fruit growing. Initially started as an experiment the scheme grew gooseberries and blackcurrants but later added strawberries, apples and plums. The success soon spread and other landowners at Wilburton, Sutton and Earith commenced fruit growing in the mid 1890s.

In the periods prior to and after World War One fruit traffic increased so that during the summer months it was necessary to import outside labour as the demand for pickers increased beyond the capacity of local people. Gipsies, 'didecoys' and the poor from Cambridge, Peterborough, Huntingdon and further afield took advantage of earning money and if the demand was beyond the capacity of the normal service trains which were strengthened, then additional services ran to the Branch stations at short notice. Special trains also ran after the withdrawal of passenger services to cater for fruit pickers spending a working holiday in the fens.

The First World War brought an immediate increase in vegetable and fruit traffic as farmers sought to increase production of food for home consumption in an effort to replace the loss of imported produce. Receipts at most of the stations increased by 80 per cent although Wilburton was somewhat less.

The tonnage of fruit traffic conveyed along the Branch was thus considerable, major development of fruit growing into the 1920s and 30s providing a lucrative traffic from all the Branch stations. The seasonal loading and types

of fruit handled included May–June gooseberries, June–July strawberries, July currants and raspberries, the latter continuing through to August, and July–September plums. So important to the Railway Company was this traffic that specials were run in 1921 and 1922 to the Daily Mail 'Imperial Fruit Show' at Crystal Palace from Kings Lynn. Cheap fares were available from Branch stations in connection with the special at Ely and many took advantage of the offer on October 30th 1922.

In contrast to the fruit and vegetable traffic conveyed one of the largest establishments served by the Branch was Drake's Forage Works at Sutton which had its own sidings, and the firm provided considerable traffic for the railway over the years.

Bricks were also despatched from the Isle of Ely Brick Works siding near Haddenham and timber from Bluntisham.

The main coal distribution depot for the area was located at Sutton where several coal merchants utilised sidings in the goods yard on the site of the old station. Coal traffic was also handled at the other stations and one enterprising merchant was Thomas Fletcher, who as well as distributing coal from Stretham station to the villages of Stretham and Little Thetford also owned the Railway Inn adjacent to the rather remote station.

The use of a tow rope during shunting which allowed a locomotive on the main line to shunt wagons in the adjacent siding or loop road was permitted at Earith Bridge. The use of the tow rope was also allowed at Stretham but only in an emergency.

The only mechanical aid provided for goods work on the Branch was a 10-cwt fixed crane located at Earith Bridge.

Goods sheds were provided at Bluntisham, Wilburton and Haddenham; the first and last were used extensively throughout the lifespan of the line but the shed at Wilburton, after extensive use up to the First World War, gradually declined until in the 1950s and 60s it went many months without use.

CHAPTER IV – LOCOMOTIVES AND ROLLING STOCK

The light nature of the permanent way on the Ely and St. Ives Branch severely restricted the choice of motive power available to the GER to work the line. Fortunately the company had an ample supply of locomotives with light axle loading to work the services, although the following locomotives were restricted from the route Nos. 725, 776/8, 1000/1, 1140–1249, 1260–1269, 1500–1571, 1790–1900.

The LNER route availability permitted the following locomotives between Ely and St. Ives via Sutton; tender, E4 and J15; tank, F3 to F7 inclusive, J62, J63, J65 to J70 inclusive, Y1, Y3, Y5, Y6 and Y10. The J17 0-6-0 tender locomotives were later permitted to travel across the line, initially with a speed restriction of 25 mph throughout. Later the LNER coded the line under Route availability 3, although the J17 class (RA4) were permitted. Double heading on the Branch was prohibited. Under British Railways the line continued as RA3, and after the elimination of steam from the GE section the following

diesel-electric locomotives were permitted to work the freight trains: BTH/Paxman Type 1 (Class 15) and Brush Type 2 (Class 31).

On April 6th 1866 ex-ECR Gooch 2-2-2 tender locomotive No. 276 hauled the inaugural train for EHSR and GER directors along the Branch. Train services from the public opening were then hauled by 'Jenny Lind' class 2-2-2 tender locomotives including Nos. 103, 105 and 107, the latter being derailed with the tender of 103 on August 6th 1866 at Ely Sutton Branch Junction. The use of the 'Jenny Lind' class in the Cambridge District alternated between the Saffron Walden and the Sutton branches.

Interspersed with the 'Jenny Lind' class, some of the Vulcan Foundry outside-cylinder 2-4-0 tender locomotives with 5-foot diameter driving wheels normally utilised on ballast workings also handled the Branch services. For the next decade the services on the EHSR and later Ely and Sutton Railway were hauled by a motley collection of ageing ex-Eastern Counties Railway tender classes.

From the late 1870s St. Ives and Ely sheds utilised representatives of Samuel Johnson's No. 1 class nicknamed 'Little Sharpies' on the Branch passenger and freight trains. Thirty of the class of forty locomotives were built by Sharp Stewart and Company and introduced into service between October 1867 and August 1872. During the years 1889-1893 the whole class was rebuilt and most were then allocated to cross-country and branch line duties. The 'Little Sharpies' sub-shedded at St. Ives and Ely were part of the Cambridge District allocation which included Nos. 1, 3, 27, 32, 36, 47, 48, 104, 106, 118, 160 and 161. No. 27 regularly worked from St. Ives along the Sutton Branch for a number of years when the service acquired the nickname of the 'Grunty Fen Express'.

When the 'Little Sharpies' were withdrawn from the Branch service around 1907 their place on the Sutton Branch was taken by Holden's T26 class 2-4-0 tender locomotives nicknamed 'Intermediates'. Originally introduced in 1891 a total of one hundred were placed into service and from the turn of the century until the withdrawal of passenger services Cambridge District 'Intermediates' subshedded at Ely or St. Ives worked the Branch passenger and mixed trains. The LNER classified the T26s to Class E4 but soon after grouping many of the locomotives were withdrawn. Usually the locomotives utilised on the Sutton Branch were in a run down condition working out their last mileage before being sent for scrap. A representative of the class ex-BR No. 62785 is now preserved in the National Railway Museum at York as GER No. 490.

From the late 1890s the Branch goods was regularly hauled by the ubiquitous J15 class 0-6-0 tender locomotives, originally introduced in 1883 as GER class Y14 to the design of T.W. Worsdell. The success of the design can be gauged by the fact that 272 were in service by the time construction of the class ceased in 1913. The class also worked ballast and special freights and in the latter years the following were known to have worked between Ely and St. Ives: 65350/6/66/91, 65406/13/25/38/39/51/57/61/74/75/77.

With the easing of axle loading restrictions after World War Two the LNER J17 class took over most workings from the J15s. The class had been superseded on heavy main line freight work by larger locomotives and their additional tractive effort proved advantageous on the Branch freight services

especially during the fruit and sugar beet seasons. A total of 44 locomotives were built to the designs of J. Holden as Class G58 between 1900 and 1911 and engines known to have handled the freight service on the Branch in BR days included 65501/2/3/5/6/15/17/18/20/21/25/29/32/35/37/38/46/47/54/55/56/61/63/65/71/73/75/76/77/83/84/85/87/89.

After nationalisation and the redistribution of locomotives between the various regions Cambridge usually rostered one of their London Midland Ivatt 2MT 2-6-0 tender locomotives on excursion trains across the Branch. With their light axle loading and well distributed power ratio they regularly hauled eight coach trains from Huntingdon or St. Ives to Hunstanton and Yarmouth via St. Ives and Ely and were popular with footplate crews. The 2MTs allocated to Cambridge included Nos. 46465/6/7.

It was usual and for many years an unwritten local railway law for a tender locomotive to be rostered to the Sutton Branch services because of the lack of watering facilities at intermediate stations. Tank locomotives were rarely utilised and if so had to enter the Branch with side tanks fully topped up with the proviso that there was no delay incurred en route. However in 1909/10 S.D. Holden introduced twelve of his class Y65 2-4-2T locomotives for light Branch passenger duties and for a short period Nos. 1307 and 1308 were put to work on Sutton Branch services. From all accounts they were not popular with footplate staff and were displaced elsewhere, No. 1308 subsequently becoming the regular engine on the Somersham—Ramsey Branch.

The only other tank class to be utilized on the Branch were J. Holden's C32 class (LNER Class F3) 2-4-2Ts when at one time the locomotive allocated to Huntingdon had a booked working across the fens between St. Ives and Ely. F3s which regularly worked on the line included Nos. 8061 and 8066.

When the EHSR opened for traffic a locomotive was stabled overnight at Sutton where simple facilities were maintained including a coaling stage, water-tank and a small turntable installed at the insistence of the Board of Trade inspector and built by Simpson, the Contractor, at a cost of £68 7s. Although mention was also made regarding the provision of a locomotive turntable at Thetford Corner, there is no evidence to confirm whether it was installed or not as the GER already possessed a turntable at Ely. Indeed the turntable at Sutton appears to have been little used, hence the derailment of 'Jenny Lind' locomotive No. 107 working tender first to Ely. It is believed two sets of men were outbased at Sutton including Driver Beaumont involved in the accident at Ely Sutton Branch Junction. When the extension from Sutton to St. Ives was opened to traffic the locomotive facilities were withdrawn, motive power staff transferred and the line worked by Ely and St. Ives depots.

As well as Ely and St. Ives footplate staff signing route knowledge sheets for the Sutton Branch, Cambridge, March, Peterborough and Huntingdon men also signed for the route in GER and early LNER days. After the withdrawal of passenger services Ely, Cambridge and March men worked the freight services.

In GE days the whistle code to be sounded at Needingworth Junction was one distinct sound for the main line and three distinct sounds for trains requiring the Sutton Branch. Similarly at Ely, Sutton Branch Junction signalbox one distinct sound was required for trains wishing to progress on to the Sutton Branch.

In GER days first class engines were allowed to work 35 goods trucks and 30 coal trucks on the Branch. Second class engines were limited to 30 and 25 wagons respectively whilst third class engines were limited to 25 and 20 wagons. If the Sutton Branch passenger locomotives 'Little Sharpies' Nos. 7 to 25 worked mixed trains, they were not allowed to haul more than 14 coal trucks with 3 coaches or 17 goods trucks with 3 passenger coaches. When working goods only the class were limited to 16 coal trucks or 20 goods trucks. The LNER and BR limited the E4 class to 26 heavy, 46 goods and 52 empties, the J15 class to 31 heavy, 55 goods and 60 empties in the Up direction, and 32, 57 and 60 respectively in the Down direction, whilst the J17s were limited to 40 heavy, 60 goods and 60 empties in each direction.

The GER placed no weight or loading gauge restrictions for coaching stock on the Ely-St. Ives line and conventional branch line stock was utilised. Before 1900 the coaching stock was exclusively 4-wheel, provided with oil lighting and equipped with the Westinghouse brake. During the 1870s the stock provided was of Eastern Counties Railway design 21 to 24 feet in length, whilst from the late 1880s and during the 1890s the older stock was superseded by 4-wheel vehicles of 26 to 27 feet body lengths. A set of three or four coaches formed of 4-compartment 1st/3rd composite, one or two 5-compartment thirds and brake/third usually sufficed for most periods of the year although if the train required strengthening another 5-compartment third was added. Prior to the abolition of 2nd class accommodation outside the London suburban area, the composite would have provided 1st/2nd class accommodation.

Soon after the turn of the century the 4-wheel stock used on the line was replaced by 6-wheel vehicles. A three or four coach set, formed of 1st/3rd composite with luggage accommodation, one or two 6-compartment thirds and a brake 3rd usually sufficed for normal working.

Just prior to grouping the GER were seeking economies as mentioned earlier and conductor guard working instituted with specially equipped rolling stock. These coaches were converted in 1922 from ordinary main line stock built between 1888 and 1896 and appeared in the crimson lake livery adopted in 1919 by the GER. In due course the LNER repainted the stock in the familiar teak livery.

The vehicles forming the Branch train usually consisted of a 1st/3rd 6-wheel composite, a full third and a 3 or 4 compartment brake/3rd. The coaches were gangwayed internally with a centre door and drop plates at the end of each vehicle to afford the guard access between vehicles when collecting fares. The brake/third had a central gangway for the guards compartment to the end door at the opposite end of the vehicle while accommodation was provided for 24 third class passengers and 1 ton of luggage. The brake had retractable steps on each side of the vehicle which were adapted to move out from the vehicles and inwards flush with the edge of the vehicle. These steps, provided for use at the new halts, were never used on the Ely-St. Ives services. The vehicles formed three or four to a branch train, sufficed until the withdrawal of passenger services on February 2nd 1931.

Conversion of passenger carrying stock from oil to gas lighting was almost complete by the early 1900s and carriage charging of gas was carried out on the branch vehicles at Ely or Cambridge. For repairs and routine maintenance

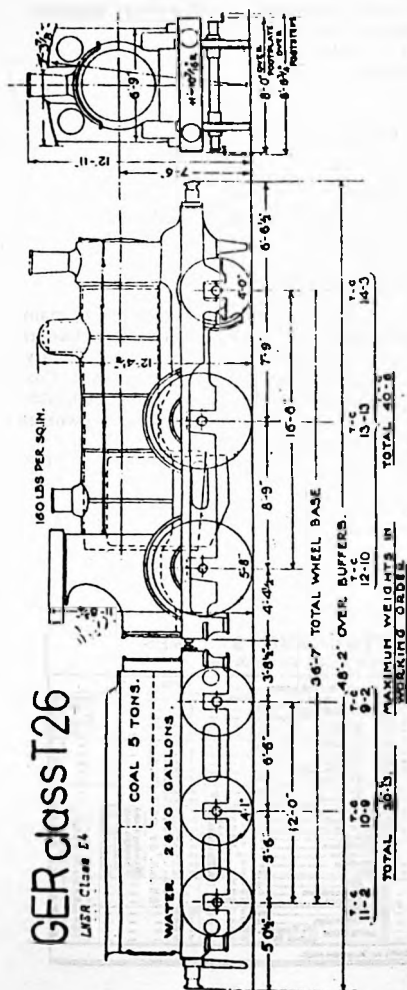
the coaching stock was returned to Cambridge for attention. Similarly replacement vehicles were provided by Cambridge.

A variety of non-passenger carrying stock was utilised on the Branch ranging from fitted vans for perishable traffic, fruit and flowers, cattle wagons from the transport of livestock to and from the markets at St. Ives and Ely, horse boxes, carriage wagons and milk vans. As with passenger stock there were no restrictions on GER wagon types along the Branch although the majority consisted of 5-plank or high-sided opens for general merchandise and brick traffic and covered vans for fruit and perishables. Coal traffic was usually handled in local merchants' wagons or private owner colliery wagons for domestic use. Coal and the substantial sugar beet traffic in later years were handled in 16 ton all steel mineral open wagons.

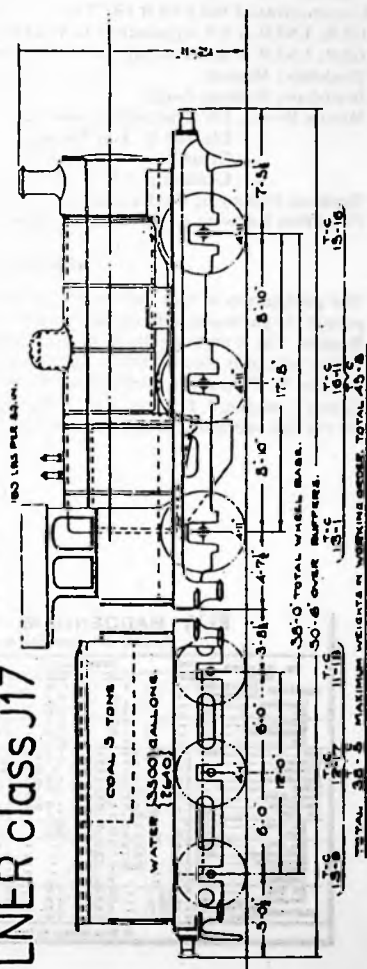
PRINCIPLE DIMENSIONS OF LOCOMOTIVES

GER Class	Jenny Lind	Little Sharpie	T26	Y14	G58
LNER Class	—	—	E4	J15	J17
Wheel arrangement	2-2-2	2-4-0	2-4-0	0-6-0	0-6-0
Cylinders	15in x 20in	16in x 22in	17½in x 24in	17½in x 24in	19in x 26in
Motion		Stephenson with slide valve	Stephenson with slide valve	Stephenson with slide valve	Stephenson with slide valve
Heating tubes	124 x 2in	223 x 1½in	242 x 1½in	242 x 1½in	158 x 1¾in
Heating surface	800sq.ft	959.24sq.ft	1164.7sq.ft	1169.3sq.ft	1275.1sq.ft
Grate area	12.7sq.ft	12.4sq.ft	18.0sq.ft	17.9sq.ft	21.6sq.ft
Boiler pressure	120lbs PSI	140lbs PSI	160lbs PSI	160lbs PSI	180lbs PSI
Leading wheels	4ft 0in	3ft 8in	4ft 0in	—	—
Coupled wheels	6ft 0in	5ft 8in	5ft 8in	4ft 11in	4ft 11in
Trailing wheels	4ft 0in	—	—	—	—
Tractive effort	—	—	14700lbs	16942lbs	24340lbs
Length over buffers	—	—	48ft 2in	47ft 3in	50ft 6in
Wheelbase	14ft 6in	14ft 0in	16ft 6in	16ft 1in	17ft 8in
Weight	23tons 11cwt	30tons 15cwt	40tons 6cwt	37tons 2cwt	45tons 8cwt
Max. axle load	—	—	14tons 3cwt	13tons 1cwt	16tons 11cwt
Tender					
wheelbase	—	9ft 0in	12ft 0in	12ft 0in	12ft 0in
wheels	3ft 6in	3ft 8in	4ft 1in	4ft 1in	4ft 1in
weight	—	18tons 16cwt	30tons 13cwt	30tons 13cwt	38tons 5cwt
water	—	1184galls	2640galls	2640galls	3500 galls
coal	—	—	5tons	5tons	5tons

LVSA C1300 E6



LINEAR class J17



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|---|---|
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| Railway World | London and North Eastern Railway Magazine |
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